



WOMEN'S INITIATIVE FOR SELF EMPOWERMENT



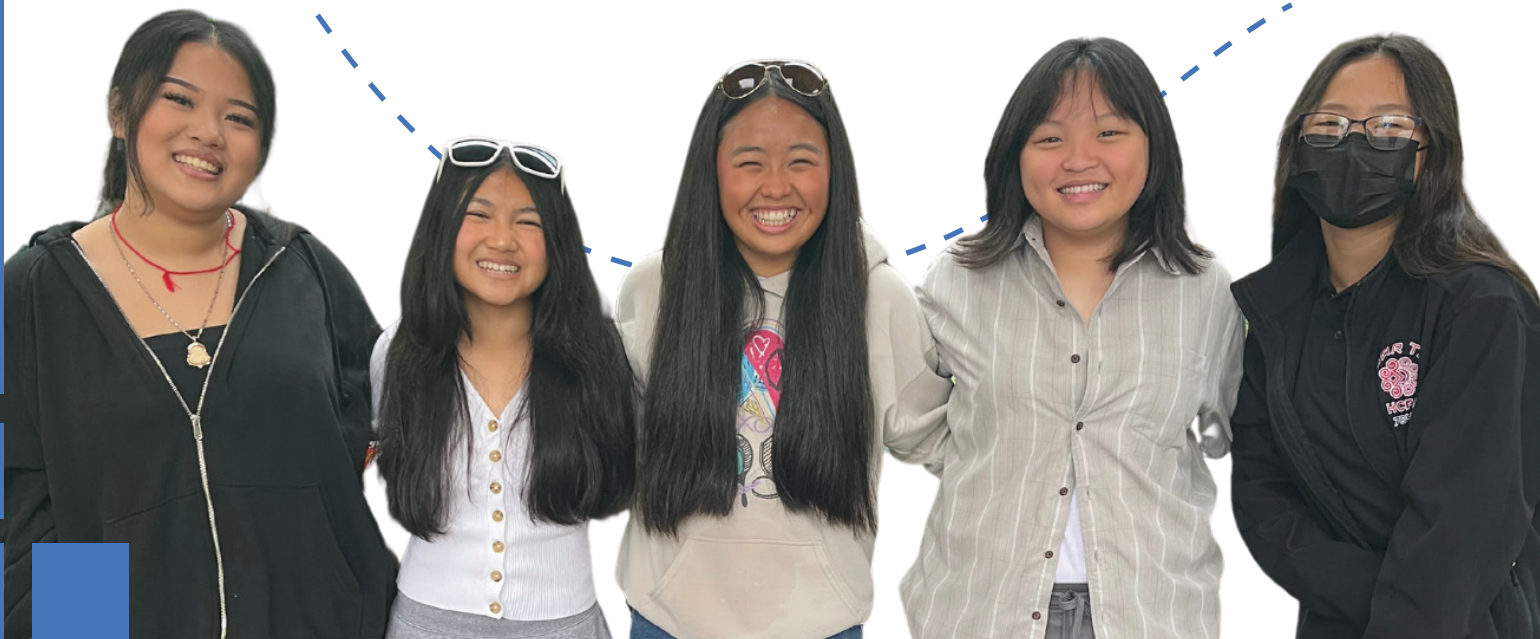
2023 Annual Report

FY January 2023 - December 2023

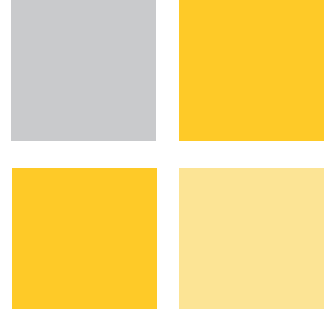
www.womenofwise.org

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Letter from our executive director



Dear Friends & Supporters of WISE,

Another year has passed with some greater challenges and accomplishments. This past year has held much sorrow for so many people in our communities as well as globally. There has been an exponential increase in internally displaced people and refugees due to war, natural disasters and the economic impact of climate change. WISE has met these challenges by partnering with some of its past international fellows to develop programming and training opportunities to address the needs of refugees and economic migrants. WISE' Parent Encouragement Specialist also developed workshops for parents/guardians and youth on trauma and its impact on parenting and youth development, coping strategies, and mental health and wellness. WISE offers its curricula and technical assistance free of charge and makes these curricula and workshops available through its online platforms and through its partnerships with other coalitions and programs associated with the U.S. Department of State.

Locally, WISE had some firsts this past year. A Youth-led and Youth-designed Immigrant & Refugee Youth Summit was held last fall with 60 students in attendance. There were an additional 20 students who could not be accommodated due to the space capacity. This will be an annual event with the 2024 Youth Summit hosting between 120-150 youth. WISE staff presented at two different international conferences, one in Romania and the other in London, on working with immigrant and refugee girls/ female-identified students and their families. And WISE convened a group of Hmong domestic/sexual violence advocates to create a culturally-responsive framework for developing a new active bystander

intervention model specific to the Hmong community for the prevention of gender-based violence.

In 2023 WISE added another school to its Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership (GGAL) and Healthy Relationship program sites, Hmong College Prep Academy (and in January 2024 added HOPE Community Academy serving high school students). Hmong College Prep Academy students are middle-schoolers and receiving credit for the classes WISE provides.

WISE also had some staff and board changes as people moved onto their dream jobs or terms ended. WISE has been very fortunate to have excellent staff and board members who during their tenure help improve the infrastructure, service delivery, outreach and financial stability of the organization. Self-empowerment is part of WISE' name and as an agency all support the continued growth of staff and board members, even if it means moving on from WISE.

Fiscal year 2024 will see us moving into our goal for creating a capital campaign for a new facility, where WISE is able to provide services onsite and incorporate a social enterprise project that benefits the communities it serves. 2024 will also see an increase in staff positions and more international partnerships that support its two goals of ending child marriage and education for all girls. Please keep abreast of our progress toward our strategic plan goals by following us on our social media platforms, and explore volunteer and mentoring options the agency has to help support its middle and high school students.

Respectfully,
Pamela Zeller, Executive Director

Staff

Pamela Zeller
Executive Director

Pakou Khang, MDP
*Communications & Development
Manager*

See Lee
WeLEAD Program Coordinator

Jessica Miano
GGAL Program Coordinator

Ayman Mohamed, M.Ed
*Healthy Relationships Program
Coordinator*

Kohpa Vang
*Sexual Violence Prevention Program
Coordinator*

Zamzam Dini, MA, LAMFT
Parent Encouragement Specialist

Board

Javi Monardez
Chair

Pa Nhia Khang
Secretary

Linda Lee
*Treasurer & Marketing Committee
Member*

Amra Racic
Member

Melany Guzman
Member

Anahita Champion
*Member & Marketing Committee
Chair*

Celia Nguyen
*Member & Marketing Committee
Member*

Choua Yang
Member

Who we are

Our work impacts generations of women and girls and their families

WISE was founded by first generation immigrant women with the intention of uplifting immigrant and refugee women and girls through education, leadership development, and economic empowerment. Our work addresses the barriers and disparities immigrant and refugee women and girls face and attempts to break the chain of poverty and oppression that prevents them from thriving.

We believe that when we create equity, resources, opportunities and access for those most vulnerable in our society, we create it for all.



OUR MISSION is to support immigrant and refugee women, girls and those on the feminine gender spectrum in their journey of self-actualization through culturally-responsive education, advocacy, systems change and resource development.



WE ENVISION a world where immigrant and refugee women, girls and those on the feminine gender spectrum, are celebrated for their leadership, honored for their wisdom, and recognized for their contributions to an equitable, just and violence-free world.



Our core values

WISE' work is guided by 7 core values.



Social Justice & Advocacy

WISE advocates for systems change that increases opportunities for all people to develop their unique potential and use their assets fully, to benefit themselves and contribute to society.

Art as a Powerful Tool for Healing & Learning

WISE embraces the power of art to help immigrant and refugee girls and women to express themselves, be empowered, learn and heal; and strives to incorporate art exposure and activities into its core programming.

Equity

All human beings deserve equitable treatment and access to justice, resources, opportunities, education and fairness. WISE champions this equitable treatment and access to ensure the best possible outcomes for the immigrant and refugee girls and women it serves.

Economic Sustainability

Economic self-sufficiency is the cornerstone of being able to realize one's full potential. When immigrant and refugee girls and women fully participate in the economic system, they and the community thrive.

Cross-Cultural Communication

Each culture is nuanced in its communication, verbal and non-verbal. WISE is intentional in learning about these nuances and assisting immigrant and refugee girls and women in learning to effectively communicate across cultures and share understanding.

Diversity & Inclusiveness

Immigrant and refugee women and girls, although from different cultural backgrounds, share commonalities, and when working together they can impact social change and create solutions for themselves.

Self-Determination & Self-Actualization

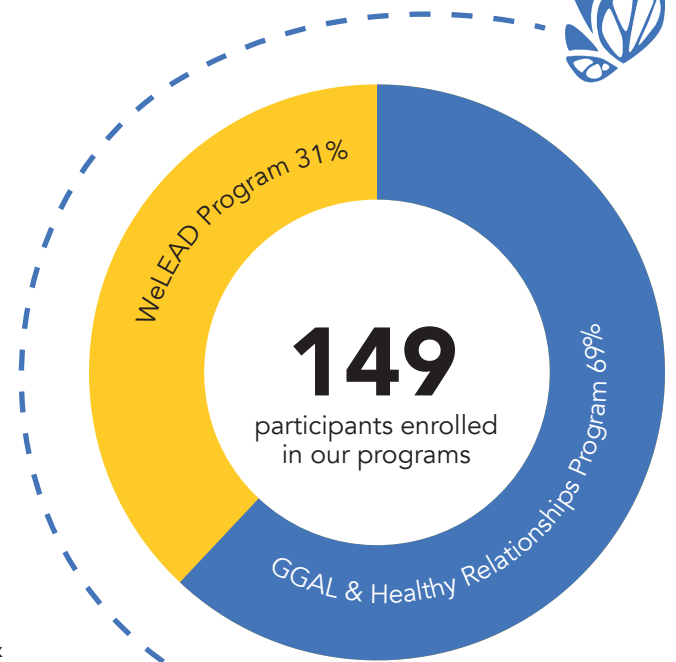
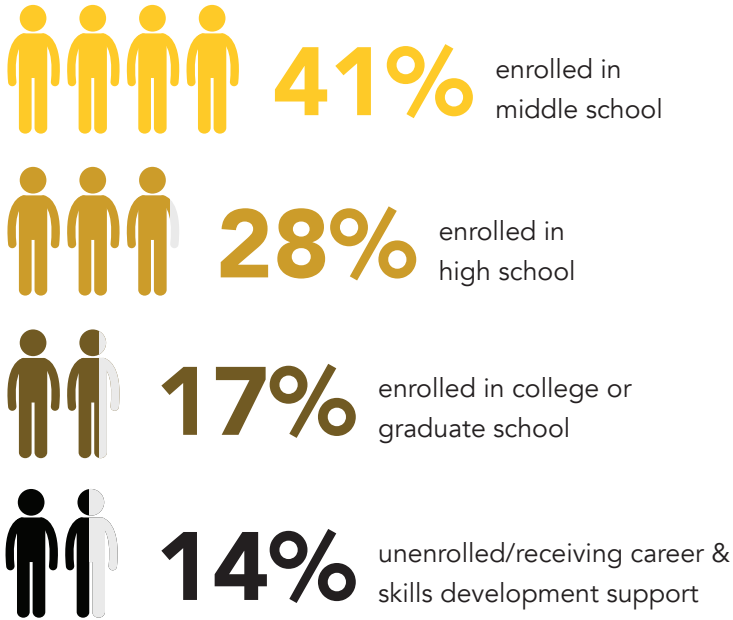
It is the right of each woman and girl to have the freedom to develop her own identity, take pride in both her cultural heritage and personal accomplishments, and choose the best path for herself.



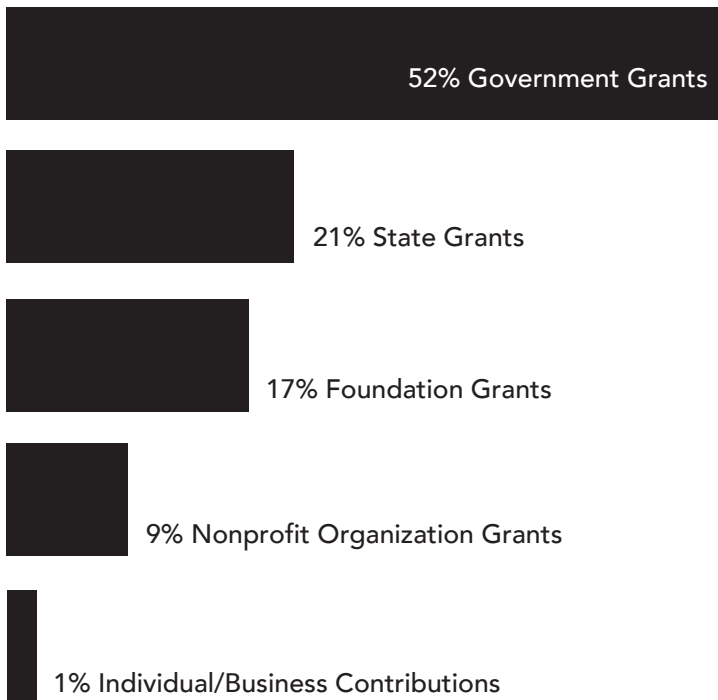
Impact Overview



Program Participation by Grade Level



\$550,240 total revenue



16
staff & board members

4
program sites

33
donors

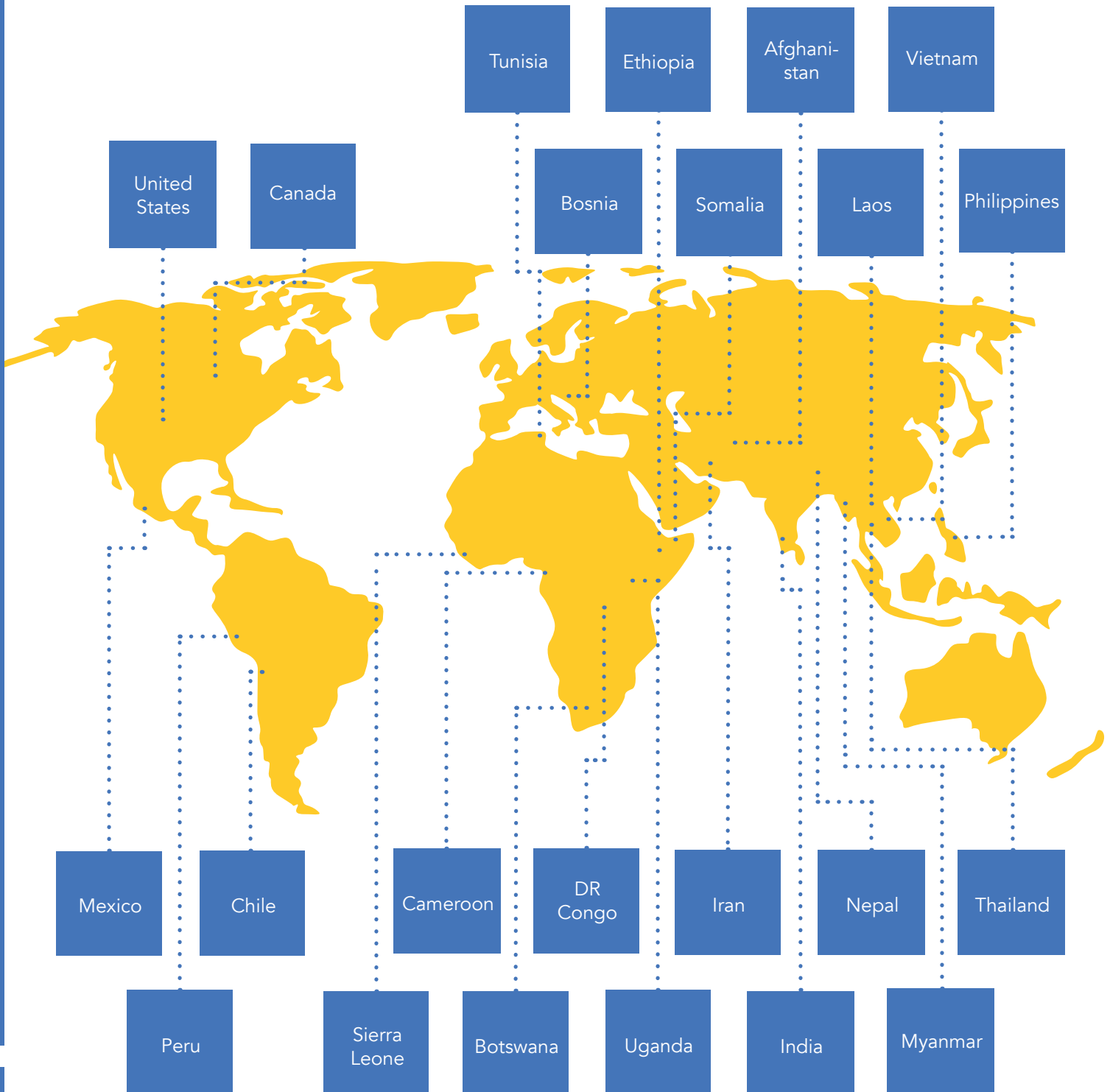
16
mentors

85
program & project partners

145
conference & workshop attendees

Where we come from

WISE values diversity, inclusion, and intentional cross-cultural communication in order to foster understanding and impact social change. In 2023, our team and program participants represented 23 different countries and 25 ethnic groups across the globe.





Looking Forward

The progress on our 2022-2027 Strategic Development Plan



New Facility

Staff began discussions on space needs and types of programmatic expansions to be accommodated in a new facility; and identifying potential funding sources for a feasibility study.



Financial Resources

WISE was chosen to participate in a fundraising cohort sponsored by GiveMN to increase organizational capacity and infrastructure to increase the number and range of individual giving to the agency. Topics included donor stewardship, cultivating new donors, messaging and streamlining online giving, as well as other subjects.



Organizational Health & Wellness

Staff now has a benefits package that includes life, short- and long-term insurance. WISE received a Rest Up grant from the Women's Foundation of MN for self-care and purchased FitBits for all of its staff; and are planning more self-care activities for 2024.



Program Development

WISE has developed workshops for parents that focus on trauma, understanding it and how it appears in their daily lives as parents and in their child's life; and coping strategies and community resources for reducing triggers and supporting mental health and wellness.



Technology

WISE developed accessibility guidelines for its social media, digital presentations and digital content that is periodically reviewed to incorporate the newest technologies and recommendations.



Communications

WISE leveraged additional resources to contract with a social media specialist, and with a fundraising coach, to further the organization's communications and development plan. The communications and development plan is monitored by the Communications & Development Manager, WISE Marketing Development Committee and the Executive Director.



Evaluation

WISE refined evaluation tools to include Photo-Voice method, and began planning for focus groups with a professional evaluator for the GGAL and Healthy Relationships programs.



Staff Development

WISE held quarterly self-care staff retreats which were planned by teams of two staff to pick the theme, and design and implement the activities.

Two staff took their two-week Sabbaticals in 2023 where they choose a project or training that supports their professional development, which may or may not correspond to their current position at WISE. This allows staff to branch out into other areas of nonprofit work that ultimately benefits the agency and the field.

All staff have workplans that include their professional and personal development goals that are reviewed on a monthly basis with the executive director to ensure that they have the support and training they need to meet their programmatic goals. Each workplan also includes one to three milestones from the long-range strategic plan that they have chosen to support the agency's work.





Self-actualization –

Realizing your full capabilities, talents, and potential for success.
Fully accepting yourself.
Feeling loved and safe in your surroundings.

Program Highlights

Empowering women and girls to reach their full potential

The [Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership \(GGAL\)](#) and [WeLEAD](#) programs guide our participants in their educational, career, and life journeys as they begin to discover their identities, interests, and goals. This includes exposing participants to diverse learning opportunities and teaching them to navigate systems and resources.

INCREASING OUR PROGRAM REACH

Our GGAL program and Healthy Relationships program are now hosted at a new school site: Hmong College Prep Academy (HCPA). This brings our total youth program sites in 2023 to four.

HOSTING OUR FIRST YOUTH SUMMIT

WISE facilitated our first youth summit, led by six youth leaders from the GGAL program. The summit, called *Inspire, Unite, Thrive*, focused on bringing immigrant and refugee youth together to build awareness and foster friendship. A total of 60 youth from five schools and organizations participated.

SUPPORTING WOMEN IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL JOURNEYS

The WeLEAD program served 46 women in college and career navigation. Each woman received individualized support to guide them on their unique self-development journeys. The program saw students from 13 colleges in Minnesota enrolled in at least 11 disciplines.



Transforming communities to be safe and violence-free

Through the [Healthy Relationships and Sexual Violence Prevention \(SVP\) program](#), WISE works with our youth and community partners to deliver violence prevention, intervention, and response strategies.

USING THE ARTS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Under the Healthy Relationships program, our youth wrote and filmed two music videos about self-love and navigating relationships.

- [Watch the “Chain” music video](#)
- [Watch the “My Honesty” music video](#)

CONCLUDING OUR FIRST SVP PROJECT

From 2020-2023, WISE partnered with Washington Technology Magnet School to address school-based dating violence, sexual assault, bullying, and stalking. The project wrapped up in September 2023 with over 500 students receiving gender-based violence education and active bystander intervention training.

BEING AN ACTIVE BYSTANDER

The SVP program facilitated two active bystander intervention trainings for the Karen community. Participants discussed how violence might look like in their respective culture and learned strategies to safely intervene when they spot signs of violence.



Supporting family health and wellbeing

The [Parent Encouragement](#) program provides trauma-informed and culturally-informed education and resources for immigrant and refugee families. In 2023, a total of 11 families from Somali, Oromo, and Afghan backgrounds received services.

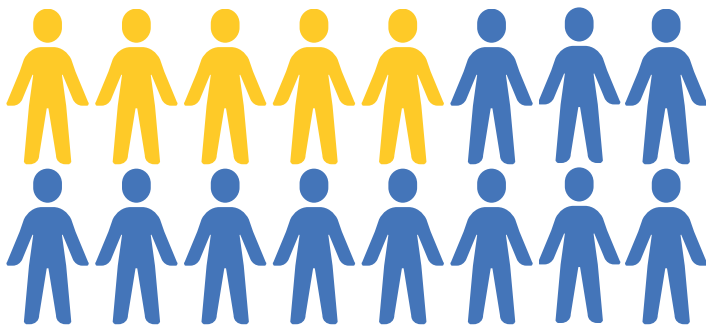
WORKING WITH NEWLY-ARRIVED AFGHAN FAMILIES

In partnership with [Lutheran Social Services](#), the Parent program facilitated workshops for Afghan families on acculturation, generational gap, trauma, and family systems.

Mentorship

Mentors provide 1-1 support to youth participants and support the youth program coordinator in facilitating lessons and activities.

In 2023, 16 mentors from five colleges/universities in the Twin Cities volunteered in our youth programs.



5 HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS PROGRAM MENTORS AND
11 GGAL PROGRAM MENTORS

"I appreciate the girls and the mentors who are in GGAL because they are very kind and understanding."

– Sernay, GGAL youth –

"I appreciate the mentors and their willingness to help out."

– Paw Mu, GGAL youth –

Mentor Spotlight



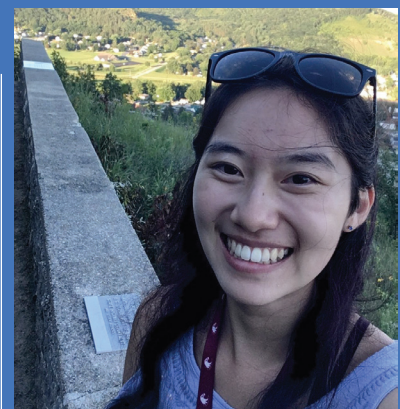
Kianna's passion for youth work leads her to mentor with the GGAL program

[Read more](#)



Mentor, Pa la, is empowered by the growth of her mentees

[Read more](#)



Mentor, Mina, develops youth work skills to support her dreams in social work

[Read more](#)

International Projects

Every year WISE collaborates with IREX to host fellows from their [Community Solutions Program \(CSP\)](#) and [Community Engagement Exchange Program \(CEE\)](#). In 2023, WISE hosted a total of 4 international fellows in 3- to 4-month fellowships, where they received skills-training and other development tools to support their individual professional goals.



Imene Ben Dhaou: CEE Fellow, Tunisia

Imene developed a research and development plan for WISE and will be further collaborating with WISE to provide capacity-building workshops in Tunisia in 2024. [Read More>](#)



Pamela Ratib: CSP Fellow, Uganda

Pamela received training and resources to support her project goal of improving the entrepreneurship skills and employability skills of refugee mothers and youth in Uganda. [Read More>](#)



Jennelaine Dingalan: CEE Fellow, The Philippines

Jen used her economics and financial education background to facilitate financial management workshops for our youth. [Read More>](#)



Bokani Thekwini: CSP Fellow, Botswana

Bokani received training and resources to support her vision of creating a mentorship program for girls in Botswana. [Read More>](#)

CSP Solutions Summit in Romania

WISE staff member, Pakou Khang (fifth from left), attended a 4-day international summit hosted by IREX. The summit focused on sharing crisis response practices and humanitarian resources among CSP alums and U.S. host organizations. WISE was able to share their work in gender empowerment for immigrant and refugee youth.

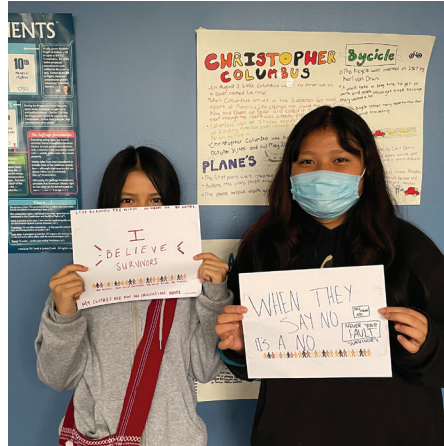


Photo Credit: IREX

Events & Campaigns



MAR 02 | Healthy Relationships Music Video "Chains" Launch Party



APR 26 | GGAL Denim Day Poster Campaign



APR 28 | Intergenerational Healing Conference



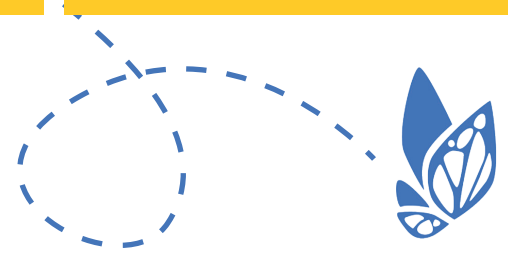
MAY 16 | WISE Strategic Plan Retreat



MAY 17 | GGAL Bake Sale Fundraiser



MAY 20 | WISE Family & Friends Potluck





**MAY
24**

End-of-the-Year
GGAL Field Trip



**SEP
29**

Listening to Youth
Conference



**OCT
01**

Domestic Violence
Awareness Social
Media Campaign



**OCT
06**

Duluth Staff Retreat



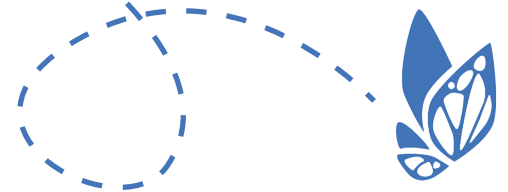
**NOV
09**

Inspire, Unite, Thrive
Youth Summit



**DEC
14**

Healthy Relationships
Music Video
"My Honesty" Launch
Party



Gratitude

Thank you to all our volunteers, board members, partners, donors, and grantmakers for making 2023 a great success.

Aaron Gutzke
Alejandro Maldonado
Alla Hassan, Ramsey County
Alysha Hill, Northern Clay Center
Amanda Ward
American Association of University Women of
Saint Paul
Amra Racic
Amy Herr
Ana Kurzer-Zlotnick
Anahita Champion
Andrea Cayetano-Jefferson, Northern Clay Center
Angela Hed Vincent
Ann Koller, St. Catherine's University Center for
Community Work and Learning
Ashlyn Pope, Northern Clay Center
Bao Vue
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota
Bokani Thekwini, CSP Program
Calla Jacobson
Cat Clements, RaiseMN Campaign Institute
Cecelia Lee, Hmong College Prep Academy
Celia Nguyen
Choua Yang
Christy and Lyndon Shirley
Community Engagement Exchange Program, IREX
Community Solutions Program, IREX
Constanza De La O
Dan Wilkening
Deeply Dee
Derek Johnson, Macalester Community Engagement
Center
Dex Wolfe
Dipakshi Sarma, Macalester Community
Engagement Center
Donaldson Foundation
Dyana Reyes
Eh Ry Win

Elias Oguz, Washington Tech Magnet School
Ellie Hohulin
Felix Martinez Pez, Esperanza United
Fiorella Parades
FR Bigelow Foundation
Gisella Reyes, UMN Nutrition Extension
GiveMN
Global Minnesota
Gold Lor, UMN Nutrition Extension
Good Helping People
Hanin Omran
Hli Xyooj, Transforming Generations
Hoonseok Oh, Sejong Academy
Imene Ben Dhaou, CEE Program
Izaiah Getahun
Jack Davis, Loonarcity
Javi Monardez
Jean-Noel Kouame
Jena McDermott
Jenee Nordstrom, Hmong College Prep Academy
Jennelaine Dingalan, CEE Program
Jessica Miano
Jo McCracken
Jolene Pearson
Joshua Levy, Washington Tech Magnet School
Julie Vang
June Way
Kajnrig Khang
Kalease Smith, Ramsey County
Kendall Doom, Washington Tech Magnet School
Lady Midnight
LaToya Taris-James, Augsburg Bonner Community
Leaders
League of Catholic Women Foundation Fund
Linda Lee
Lisa Thompson, Sejong Academy
Lutheran Social Services
Madoka Yosida

Majestanina Vang
Marcia Hayes
Mardag Foundation
Marie Nakaja
Maytong Chang, Transforming Generations
Medium Zach Woodgrain
Melany Guzman
Melinda McBride, Washington Tech Magnet School
Melissa Hoffbeck
Michele Lackey
Mina Himlie
Minneapolis Foundation
Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault Minnesota
Department of Health
Minnesota Office of Higher Education
Minnesota United FC
Moncies Franco Jr.
Monika McKay, UMN Center for Community Engaged
Learning
Mu Kaw
Muna Isse
Najat Hamza
Nallely Castro Montoya, Esperanza United
Natalie Hansen
Nibraas Khan, Asian American Organizing Project
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Ogeti Legese
Pa Nhia Khang
Pakou Khang
Pamela Ratib, CSP Program
Pamela Zeller
Panyia Khang
Peter Blong Yang
Ramsey County Minnesota
Robin Wetzel
Ryan Ritterson
Safiyo Mohamed
Saint Paul Foundation
Saint Paul Public Schools
Sara Miller, Loonarcity
Saria Abubaker, Set the Stage
Schoua Na Yang, Transforming Generations
See Lee
Seng Xiong, Transforming Generations
Sernay Than
Sharon Idowu, Humboldt High School
Sher Wah

Slider Beats
Spire Credit Union
Stephany Lopez
Suwah Tobah
Teddy Grimes
Thomas White, Sejong Academy
Trinity Vang
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence
Against Women
Vanessa Reyes Romero
Violence Free Minnesota
Women's Advocates
Women's Foundation of Minnesota
Xay Yang, Transforming Generations
Xorr Xiong, Asian American Organizing Project
Youth Intervention Programs Association
Yun K. Cho, Sejong Academy

